

KINSHIP AND FAMILY LIFE

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be that a married woman considers herself a member of her husband's family, but as a sign of respect addresses her husband's relatives in each case as though she belonged to a younger generation than she does in reality. A custom in vogue among the Shilluk may have some connection with this usage, i.e. widows other than the mother are taken as wives by a man's sons. Further, it is not considered disgraceful for young unmarried sons to sleep with their own father's wives. A young wife may thus see herself as the consort to two generations at once, and address her husband's sisters and parents by those terms that she would use if she were wife of the younger of the two successive mates. A woman still belongs to her own clan after marriage, so it seems strange that she should use the terms employed by her husband. In this connection it must be noted that in some districts husband and wife address one another as *umia* and *nyimia* before the birth of the first child, and that a man calls his wife's sister *nyimia*. This last anomaly may be due to some feeling that the wife is taken into the family of her husband, though no adoption ceremony was discovered. It should be noted that a man calls his wife's sister "sister"; he does not treat her with any ceremony, and if she visits her married sister the husband is not bound by any taboos, though he cannot have connection with her as he can with his *yura*. In certain circumstances (the death or barrenness of a wife) he may marry her.

Everywhere the "in-law" relationship is one that requires much tact, and the Shilluk, as is usual in savage society, show respect by means of ceremonial avoidance. While much emphasis is laid upon the avoidance of persons related by marriage, it should be noted that there is no avoidance between blood-relations—a man does not avoid his mother, sister, or daughter.

A Shilluk avoids all those whom he calls *ora*, of whom the first in importance is the wife's mother. In those parts of the Shilluk country that we visited, avoidance of the mother-in-law implied that a man must not enter her house, and care would be taken never to meet her face to face out of doors. If a man saw his mother-in-law he would take a different road and send a friend to greet her respectfully. We did not find avoidance carried to the length described by Hofmayr, who states that a man may not enter the village in which his mother-in-law dwells; one informant, however, told us that a man might not enter her village until the cows of the bride-wealth had been paid.

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potentially he was heir to the wives of any of his *uwa*, but that should he try to claim the widow of one of his *uwa*, not having previously avoided her mother, the latter would make much trouble about it and try to prevent him from marrying her daughter. He might perhaps be able to settle the matter by killing a sheep and getting some old man to act as peacemaker. The wide rights of access that the Shilluk have to the wives of certain of their clansmen and the wide sense in which inheritance of a "brother's" wife may be interpreted is thus intimately connected with their liberal interpretation of avoidance.

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Avoidance of certain other women would not prevent a man from entering the house and even eating there, so long as the woman absented herself and the man sat upon the bare ground. To sit upon a skin, which might be the woman's sleeping mat, would be an intolerable breach of etiquette, for such an act might be taken to imply the possibility of sexual relations.

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The wife's *mia*, i.e. her father's brother's wife, is also treated as an *ora* and avoided, but in a modified manner. We were able to observe a good example of this form of behaviour. We were working on the small steamer Culex when an old woman joined the group of informants. Our informant, Fakwang, a young married man, went quietly away. We persuaded him to return and he sat on the other side of the funnel so that he could neither see nor be seen by this woman, who was his wife's *mia* and hence his *ora*. Had she been his wife's mother nothing would have induced him to remain; as it was, he said, there would very probably be bad talk among the women about it and he might be reproached that his wife's *mia* had seen his "nakedness".

The wife's brother's wife is called *ora* and treated with the respect due to a mother-in-law. How far she is regarded as a potential mother-in-law it would be difficult to say; there would be no objection to marrying her daughter if the first wife died childless, but it did not appear to be customary. When told that among another people (the Ila Thonga) if a wife died childless the widower might claim his wife's brother's wife, or take her daughter in her stead, the custom was approved, though foreign to the Shilluk usage.¹

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Avoidance may be relaxed somewhat a few years after marriage,

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¹ Classing the wife's brother's wife with the mother-in-law is common in the Sudan: we found no reason for this, but think that given by the Nuer to Professor Evans-Pritchard may probably hold for other tribes (see p. 219). Should the wife's mother die, then her status may be held by the wife's brother's wife.

606 provided that a child has been born and survived. A man will give his wife's mother a goat, but even then he may only enter the house of the mother-in-law if the latter is very old. He may, however, speak to her and to her sister, and to his father-in-law, but still with head averted and with the utmost ceremony and politeness.

602 A man observes ceremonial avoidance of the wives of certain of his own kinsmen. Thus, although he may enter the houses of his *uma* and *umia*, *uwaja* and *una*, *oka* and *kwa*, he cannot visit them as freely as he can the house of his *uwa*, because he must avoid the wives of all these relatives (while with the wives of his *uwa* he may be on quite familiar terms). When he meets any of these women out of doors he may greet them, but with averted head.

604 A man may salute the wife of his *na* but must not sit in the hut with her; she will leave the hut when he enters, and if he should sit upon her mat or skin it would cause death either to himself, his *na*, or the wife of his *na*. A man can never inherit the widow of his *na* as can be done among some other Sudan tribes, e.g. the Bari.

606 We now pass to the male *ora* whom a man must avoid. A man avoids his wife's father, but this avoidance may become less rigid after a time, just as the severity of the mother-in-law avoidance decreases. His wife's brother is treated with respect but scarcely avoided. It was said that nothing would ever relax the avoidance between a man and his wife's mother's brother (her *na*); they may never speak face to face. No payments are made to him, but should the wife's *na* ask for anything it could not be refused; he might ask for a spear, a canoe, or a sheep, and it must be given, but he would never ask for cattle. The same privileges are claimed by the son of the *na*, the *una* of the wife. A characteristic example was seen in the case of Fakwang. He spent much time in fishing and gave large quantities of the fish he caught to his wife's parents, though the bride-wealth was already fully paid. When asked whether he had made or bought his canoe he looked surprised and said, "Have I not an *ora jaknywaja*? I took it from him." The canoe belonged to the husband of his father's sister's daughter. The father of Fakwang had been *na* to this girl and Fakwang as her *una* had inherited the privilege of the *na*, his father. The girl's husband is Fakwang's *ora* and it is he who "fears" Fakwang. The latter, however, shows respect to him and observes the avoidance rules; he did not fetch the canoe himself, but sent his *uwa* (in this instance his father's brother's son and great friend) to get it for him. It is said that a

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man and his *ora jalnywaja* might exchange presents of sheep, the gifts always being presented through a third party. 602

The husband of the sister, either the *nyimia* or the *nyiwa*, is treated in the same way as the husband of the *nyiwaja* and privileges can be claimed from him; the husband of the *nina* is also respected. Thus, though *ora* is a reciprocal term, the respect and deference shown is not mutual. The *ora* to whom deference is paid are the wife's male and female relatives. The most important of these are the mother, the father, the *na* and the *una*, the *uma* and the *umia* of the wife, all of whom are treated with ceremonial avoidance; the *uwa*, though respected, are not avoided. The *ora* from whom a man claims privileges are the husbands of sisters and cousins, especially the husbands of the *nyimia*, *nyima*, and *nywaja* from whose bride-wealth he has received cattle.

There is no avoidance between women; a woman does not avoid her husband's mother. 606

A man must kill a bull at the death feast of an *ora*, the father, mother or brother of his wife, and if he lives near his wife's family he kills a sheep on the day of the death. He must not see the corpse or assist at the burial. 607 • 764

From the above it will be seen that the conception of *ora* is far from simple. It might at first be supposed that anyone of the wife's clan was *ora* and must consequently be treated with respect, but this is not so; the wife's sister, who is naturally of her clan, is not *ora* and is treated with familiarity; the wife's father's sister (her *waja*) is not avoided. Unfortunately we did not ascertain how the latter was addressed, and do not know of any special duties of the *waja* towards her brother's daughter, though those to his son are important. But the wife's mother's brother (her *na*), who must belong to a different clan from the wife, is *ora*. 602

There seem to be four aspects of the *ora* relationship:—

- (1) The primary attitude to the wife's mother, extended on classificatory lines.
- (2) The attitude towards those relatives of the wife to whom she stands in some definite relationship.
- (3) The attitude a man observes towards the husbands of his own female relatives. Relationships (2) and (3) are reciprocal but the behaviour pattern is not identical.
- (4) A woman's attitude towards the relatives of her husband.

602 We may now consider these different aspects of the *ora* relationship in detail.

606 (1) The avoidance of the mother-in-law is so common a custom in Africa as to be considered habitual. All the implications of the mother-in-law situation cannot be discussed here, but there are two elements in the custom which must be borne in mind—the respect due to the mother of the wife, and the feeling that there must be no hint of sexual impropriety with her. The Shilluk who encountered his wife's father's brother's wife on our steamer said that she would complain to other women that she had seen his "nakedness". Among a people like the Shilluk, who when they wear any garment only knot a cloth over the shoulder, leaving the genitals exposed, this objection seems remarkable, and does point to the sexual nature of the avoidance. So, by demonstrating in a ceremonial manner that 835 there can never be any possibility of sexual intercourse between himself and any woman whom he treats as mother-in-law, he leaves open an approach to her daughter. If a young Shilluk, who has not yet collected sufficient cattle to marry, desires to exercise his right and consort with the wife of one of his *awa*, he must treat her mother with respect as though he were the actual husband, and if he has not previously adopted this attitude trouble may arise. Or it may be that he wishes to take the widow of one of his *awa* as a wife; if he has previously respected the mother-in-law of that *awa* the way is open, if not, she will make objections which may or may not be overcome by gifts.

606 It is clear that in the wide sense in which the Shilluk use the term *ora* for mother-in-law they cannot actually avoid all these women, and certainly not their villages, for among these *ora* will be found almost all the women of a previous generation not of the man's own clan. Actually a man is concerned to avoid the *ora* of those of his *awa* with whom he comes in contact, or of those whose marriages are personally interesting to him.

606 As already mentioned, the wife's brother's wife is addressed as *ora* and seems to be looked upon as similar to a mother-in-law. It 607 is clear that she stands in a relationship quite different from that of a wife's sister or a brother's wife. But no reasons were discovered for treating her as a mother-in-law.

606 (2) Amongst these relatives may be considered the wife's father 607 and her brothers. They are her natural protectors to whom she may 583

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complain if her husband ill-treats her; it is to them that the bride-wealth is given, and the fact that this should be returned should the die childless seems to indicate that the bride-wealth may be considered as compensation to her family for the loss of her children rather than as a payment for her as a wife. The wife's *na* and his son both receive part of the bride-wealth, and though they do not belong to her clan they also are *ora*. The avoidance of these relatives of the wife is by no means a common custom (and is not practised by the Dinka). It appears to be correlated to the fact that they receive some of the cattle of the bride-wealth. 606 607 583 [604]

(3) The attitude towards the husbands of female relatives is the converse of the above. Though a man must observe respectful behaviour towards the husbands of his sisters and certain cousins, he appears to be in a more favourable position towards them. He receives part of the bride-wealth given by them for his sisters and certain "cousins", and can demand favours from them. 607 583

(4) A woman only looks upon her husband's uterine brothers and his mother's sister's sons as her *ora*. She avoids them strictly; any hint of familiarity would be an offence. It is clear that the nature of the avoidance is sexual, and that by means of its observance the possibility of impropriety is prevented. These relatives of the husband stand in sharp distinction to all others. 607 835

Although the Shilluk conception of the "in-law" relationship is broad, the omissions from it are as striking as the inclusions. The wife's sisters do not come under the heading *ora* at all. A man may always treat them with familiarity and, if he wants to, take one as a second wife; he has prior claim to anyone else but must give the full bride-wealth. We were told that a rich man might marry all the *wamis* of his wife. The wives of the *awa* are not *ora*; the wives of clansmen stand in two definite categories—those with whom sexual intercourse is permissible and those with whom it is not—and to most of them descriptive terms are used. The wives of all those clansmen called either *wa* or *awa* belong to the former class, but intercourse with the wives of any other clansmen is said to cause death to both offenders. Care would be taken in dealing with the second class to avoid anything that could possibly be looked on as a compromising situation, such as staying in the house of these relatives when their wives are present, or sitting upon the mat or skin of the woman. Thus, though not called *ora*, they are avoided ceremoniously. 607 [595] 602 835

606 The omissions from the "in-law" category are equally important
603 from the woman's point of view. She does not call her husband's
parents *ora*, but addresses them as though they were her own grand-
parents; she treats them with respect, kneels when she hands anything
to her father-in-law, and turns her head away when she speaks, but
there is no strict avoidance. One of our married informants had his
mother living with him; she had a separate hut in his enclosure,
but she and his wife could eat together if they wished.

A man calls his son's wife *kware*, grandchild; she falls into the
category of wives of a clansman with whom sexual intercourse is
inadmissible, and no doubt the ceremonial behaviour observed
between grandchildren and grandparents is also followed between a
man and his son's wife. It has been noted before that a woman uses
terms to her husband's relatives that she would use to her own
relatives of a generation older, and the custom of consorting with
the husband's son and being inherited by him has been suggested
as a reason for this.

602 We have seen that there are certain other women who are treated
in the same ceremonial manner as are the *ora*; these are wives of
relatives, some, but not all, of whom are clansmen (see p. 61).
These women fall into sharp contrast with those other women (wives
of clansmen, the *wa* and the *usu*) with whom connection is permitted
during the life of the husband and who may possibly be inherited
after his death.

583 Young people are free to marry the partner of their choice so
long as clan exogamy is observed and no genealogical relationship
584 can be traced on the mother's side. Every Shilluk youth is interested
in the marriage of his sister and of his father's sister's daughter,
for he receives cattle from their bride-wealth and without cattle
he cannot himself marry; it is true that his father and his father's
sister will assist him to collect cattle for his bride-wealth, but how
can they get these except from the marriage of their daughters?

593 A father who used his cattle to marry extra wives while his own
620 sons remained unmarried would be regarded generally with disfavour.
The breaking of a marriage—divorce—means the return of cattle

583 to the bridegroom, a difficult matter, as though the bride-wealth is
586 paid to one man, the bride's father or brother, it is immediately
distributed and may soon play its part in another's marriage. Thus

607 a man has every reason to desire his sister's marriage to be stable.
Yet, in the rules of behaviour that are customary between persons

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related by marriage, it is the bridegroom who pays special deference to his wife's relatives and not vice versa. A man may claim privileges from his sister's husband, and though he must make his demands politely they will not be denied. On the other hand, a man may show much zeal in doing services for his wife's relatives that are not absolutely necessary. It must be remembered that the "in-law" relationship begins early, as soon as betrothal negotiations are started; the prospective bridegroom is particularly anxious to please his future bride's relatives so that they in turn may influence her not to break off the engagement; indeed, the fear of losing the woman persists even after marriage. Should any of the cattle of the bride-wealth die the bride's relatives can claim that they should be replaced, and Hofmayr states that when cattle plague is prevalent marriages are frequently dissolved as the husband cannot make good the losses.¹ There are thus abundant reasons why the bridegroom should seek to keep on good terms with his wife's relatives and by his correct behaviour prevent the possibility of rupture. Mr. Heasty states that it is very rare for a husband to divorce his wife, it is usually the wife or her family who initiates the separation.

There are no special houses built for adolescent boys or girls. The former sleep in the cattle byres (*luak*). When there are several unmarried girls in a village any house may be given to them that happens to become vacant, and the girls will sleep there together; such a house will be called *odwaman*. Their boy friends will come by night and call to them to join them. We do not know whether custom imposes any restrictions on their behaviour, nor whether only eligible boys are received, that is to say, those who are neither related by blood nor of the same clan, but we believe that this is the case, and it seems that such courtship usually leads to marriage.

Hofmayr states that the girls assume a tone of considerable hauteur; the meetings must take place outside the village and the parents must not be told, though they would not meddle in the affairs of the young people. He also states that the girl chooses whom she likes and that she usually breaks several engagements before finally accepting a suitor, this being considered no disgrace except when carried to excess. A girl who has had more than ten lovers is looked upon as *nyu dey cian*, a fast woman. Betrothals may be arranged young, but it is doubtful whether marriage would be enforced if the girl preferred another youth when she had reached a marriageable age.

¹ Op. cit., 293.

but the usual fine for making another man's wife pregnant consists of three cows and one bull; if pregnancy does not result the fine is two head of cattle. Fines for seduction are paid to the girl's father and vary from one to three head of cattle according to whether or not the girl is made pregnant. If a woman has committed adultery, she confesses it at the time of childbirth; her husband then exacts the appropriate fines from the men concerned.

If children have been born outside marriage the eventual husband may take them over and will pay extra bridewealth cattle. Failing this, they are brought up in the fold of their maternal uncle and belong to his clan. He will receive the bridewealth paid on the marriage of the girls. (1)

Widow Inheritance

According to Westermann widows are inherited by the brothers of the dead husband or by his sons, who take the wives who are not their own mothers. He then adds that, if children are begotten from these wives, they belong to the family of the dead man and "they are like his own children." (2) This custom of raising up seed to the name of the dead man is general among the Nilotic tribal groups.

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Oru

The in-law relationship of *oru* has been commented on by Seligman and Pumphrey. It appears to have two particular applications, being used in a narrow and in a wider sense.

A man describes as *oru* all his wife's kinsmen and, strictly, all the kinsmen of the wives of the men of his own generation belonging to his own clan. This extension may be because he is allowed, at any rate in theory, to have access to the wives of such clansmen and temporarily takes over the in-law relationship with their parents. During the first years of marriage the members of the husband's *gol* have to respect and to avoid the members of the wife's *gol*. Pumphrey suggests that the basic reason for this is that the initial period of marriage is an unstable one and friction is gradually resolved as the bridewealth is paid off and children are born. To avoid friction the husband does not speak to his *oru* and meets them as little as possible.

In a wider sense the *oru* tie is connected with certain sex taboos. The breach of these taboos is believed to cause *deale* sickness, a form of illness believed to affect both mother and child who will die unless the man who induced the mother to break the taboo will split a gourd in two and sacrifice a sheep. (3) There are certain *oru* relationships between lineages and one lineage will be *oru* to another. Thus, if men of lineage A have married women of lineage B, C and D, there are *oru* relationships between A and B; A and C; A and D. In such a case no men of lineages B, C and D

(1) Pumphrey, *S.N.S.* 1941, Vol. XXIV, pp. 34-5.

(2) Westermann, *The Shilluk People*, 1912, p. 114.

(3) Pumphrey, *S.N.S.* 1941, Vol. XXIV, p. 29.

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only in the one case already described does he receive anything ; i.e., 583
when he claims from the bride wealth of his niece such cattle as are in
arrears from the marriage of his sister. Where such arrears are
claimed they are a first charge upon the new cattle payments."

ORA.

A man will describe as *Ors* not only all his wife's kinsmen but 607
also, strictly speaking, all kinsmen of the wives of all his own kinsmen.
Obviously, if strictly thus interpreted, *ors* would embrace a very large
group indeed. But the word has two senses. In its wider sense it
does embrace a very large group, though as will be seen later the extent
of the group embraced is limited by a not too rigorous interpretation
of the word "kinsmen." In this wider sense it has a significance in
the various sex taboos such as *dwalo* which will be considered later.
For the moment consideration of this wider sense will be postponed to a
consideration of the *ors* tie in its narrower sense of the tie which unites
a husband to the *gol* of his wife.

Throughout the earlier years of the marriage members of the hus-
band's *gol* have to pay special reverence³³ to the *gol* of his wife. The
reason for this, as for so many marriage customs, is the recognised
necessity of avoiding all possible causes of friction during what may
be called the period of tension. This tension is the product of a definite
inequilibrium. The husband's *gol* are acutely aware of having paid 581
ten head of cattle as pledge for the as yet uncertain good behaviour 607
of the wife. As the wife produces children she pays off, so to speak,
the marriage cattle at the rate of five head of cattle for each daughter
and two for each son until, when she has produced two daughters or
five sons (or an arithmetically suitable combination of the sexes),
the tension is resolved. Thereafter no law suit would follow the breach
of the marriage since it would be considered that the husband's *gol*
had got their "money's worth." During the period of tension the 607

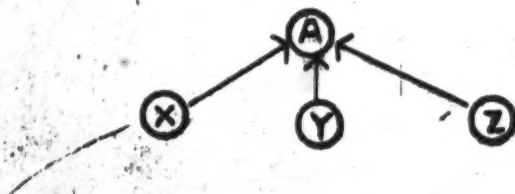
33. An example may clarify this. X has been married by A who has paid 6 head
of cattle only. Y is the brother of X. X has, by A, a daughter, Z, who is married by P.
The bride wealth paid by P all goes to A, but A must pay 4 head of cattle to Y, because
these are due in arrears to Y from the marriage of X. Y is of course the maternal uncle of Z.

34. W'wv.

- 607 husband will not speak to his *ors* and if he meets them on the road will step hurriedly off the roadway and allow them to pass.

SEX TABOOS.

607 The *ors* tie in the wider of the two senses above described, is of
613 practical importance only in connexion with certain sex taboos breach
835 of which is visited by *dualo* sickness. In what follows the word *pac*
(or *pa*) must be taken to mean a lineage (i.e., a detachment of a clan
within a settlement). The expression *pa ors* thus means a *pac* which
is *ors* to the speaker's *pac*. Since the speaker's *pac* will not all have
married into one and the same *pac* it follows that it will have several
of these. Thus in the diagram:—



582 If there has been intermarriage between A on the one hand and X,
835 Y and Z on the other, then X, Y and Z are all *ors* to A, A being recipro-
613 cally *ors* to X, Y and Z. If men of A have married women from X,
607 Y and Z, no men of X, Y or Z may marry women from A. To have
other than "one-way traffic" would hopelessly confuse the issues.

It might be supposed that, since in each *pac* (in the particular enlarged sense of the word defined above) there may average fifty married men, the number of *pacs* which are *ors* would be nearly as numerous. In fact this is not the case because each *pac* develops a tendency to marry women from another particular *pac*³⁵. This tendency is nothing more than a traditional convention with which it is not

³⁵ For example it is the tendency of the youths of Fathworo to marry girls of Adhidiang.

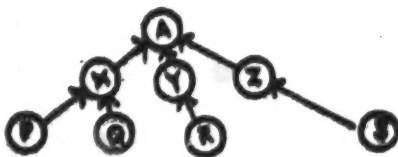
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compulsory to comply. It will be seen later that it lessens the possibility of *dwalo*.

*Dwalo*³⁶

In this diagram:—



X, Y and Z are, as before, *ora* of A (men of A having married women from them). X have married women from P and Q; Y have married women from R; and Z have married women from S. The entire membership of P, Q, R and S stands to *pac* A as *myer man ora*,³⁷ that is to say *myer ora* of the *myer ora* of A (or "villages of the wives of the *ora* of A," an exact translation of "*myer man ora* A"). To have sexual relations with a woman of a village which is thus *ora* of the second degree (*pa man ora*) is to break a taboo and incur the supernatural sanction of *dwalo* sickness.

The same sickness is said to be produced by incest or by a man having relations with a woman to whom he is related; but it seems that the most grievous form is that incurred in the manner described. It will appear complicated but to the Shilluk it is a simple conception. Nothing is more important than to avoid friction with one's *pa ora* and nothing is better calculated to produce it than the seduction of a *pa man ora* girl. This may require explanation. As already said

36. *Dwalo* is a form of sickness which from a description of the symptoms would appear to resemble dropsy. Both the woman concerned and her child are affected, and it is believed that they will die unless the man who has seduced her in contravention of the taboo makes a prophylactic sacrifice by splitting a gourd, killing a sheep and putting the stomach contents on top of the gourd in the road-way, "so that the people passing—by may carry away the *dwalo*."

37. *Myer* is the plural of *pac*.

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182 there develops a tendency for *pac* A (to refer again to the diagram above)
 582 to marry women of *pac* X. Men of *pac* A will therefore have ready
 607 access to the unmarried girls of *pac* X, as, similarly, will men of *pac* X
 613 have ready access to the unmarried girls of their *pa ora*, P. Now if a
 835 man of *pac* A seduces a girl of *pac* P it naturally annoys the men of
pac X who regard *pac* P girls as in some sense their prerogative.

Dwalo is thus a good example of a religious sanction harnessed to the service of social expediency. Without doubt, although no Shilluk volunteered the explanation, the *dwalo* taboo has developed from the consciousness that seduction must be rigorously discouraged where it would imperil good relations between *ora*.

DIVORCE.

768 The verb *tang* is used for the breaking of a marriage, whether owing
 587 to the death of the wife or to her refusal to live with her husband. Cases
 where the wife dies are naturally less acrimonious than those of the other kind and will be considered first.

583 Where a marriage is terminated by the death of the wife, her *gol*
 768 must either present to the husband an unmarried sister as *hai ot*,³⁸ or
 587 they must return the cattle (or their equivalent in similar animals) making deductions for children born of the marriage and living at the time of their mother's death. These deductions are generally at the rate of two head for each son and five for each daughter, the children of course going to their father. Thus a husband who has paid the full bride wealth of ten head and has a son and a daughter alive and born of the marriage can reclaim only three head of cattle.

586 Cases resulting from the refusal of the wife to cohabit with her husband may be more properly described as cases of divorce. Divorce in this sense results not from any act of the parties but from a state of affairs judicially recognised as warranting the return to the husband of the bride wealth, with or without suitable deductions for children born. Deductions are usually made, but if it is held that the behaviour of the wife has been particularly blame-worthy the husband is sometimes

38. Literally "substitute of the house."